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A Few Great Captains

The Men and Events
That Shaped the Development
of U. S. Air Power

By DeWitt S. Copp

The Air Force Historical Foundation

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It was July 15, 1933.

Behind the pomp and ceremony that would greet the ninety-six Italian fliers [led by General Italo Balbo] with waving flags, speeches and celebration reaching all the way to the White House, was the fact that in a peaceful show of aeronautical daring, a long debated but little accepted military theory had been given added credibility. Those who held this belief maintained the airplane was a potential weapon of war that transcended all others — a strategic weapon whose long-range striking power could eliminate an enemy's industrial might, a weapon limited only by the state of its present development.

Regretfully, for the advocates of air power, this concept was not an accepted military axiom by either the Army or the Navy, the battle over the proper use of military air power having gone on since the end of World War I. Shortly after Balbo led his armada on the longest aerial feat of its kind, the General Staff of the War Department, in air plan recommendations, denigrated the underlying military meaning of the spectacular flight, saying it had no bearing on the future. This denigration would continue in the years before World War II began. Integral to it was the equally explosive question: Who should control Army air power, General Staff ground officers or airmen themselves?

This book, the first of two, explores the lives and actions of a handful of air officers who believed they had the answer, and it is against this backdrop that the protagonists — Frank Andrews, Hap Arnold, Ira Eaker, Benny Foulois, Tooey Spaatz, and their compatriots — waged their battles for independent thought and command. . . . They were officers who laid their careers and reputations on the line, and frequently — in the pursuit of greater aeronautical knowledge — their lives. What follows is their combined and interwoven story, recounting their careers from the early days of powered flight to the onset of World War II, in September 1939.

from

A FEW GREAT CAPTAINS

DeWitt S. Copp